

India-US Relations

—By Wing Commander Dinesh Mathur, VSM (Retd.)

As we know, discussion is an exchange of ideas, information or knowledge. There is a marked difference between a discussion and an argument, and educated people always prefer a discussion. The purpose of a group discussion is usually to gain more information or ideas to resolve an issue. This is done by asking members of a group to come together and present their views or offer possible solutions to overcome a difficult situation. Conducting group discussions is a common practice in both official and social platforms for the above-mentioned purposes. Currently, group discussion (GD) also plays an important role in the selection process of reputed B-Schools for MBA courses as well as selection of candidates for entry-level jobs in various organisations, including PSUs, etc. As a selection tool, group discussion has now assumed significance owing to the fact that through a group discussion, many abilities and qualities of candidates emerge, which are considered essential for managers and administrators. GD round is mainly conducted to test the ability of a candidate's interactive skills. During a group discussion, while a number of individual qualities, such as self-confidence, power of expression, awareness, reasoning skills and listening skills, etc. are visible, GD is essentially a situation where you interact with people you have never talked to before. You will be judged on how you get along with them and how well you are able to put your points of view across without being rude. It also checks whether you can be a part of a team or not.

Ten candidates were called for a GD session during the selection process of managers in a well-reputed PSU. Since taking part in a GD session is a formal occasion, all candidates arrived formally dressed as dressing up nicely boosts your confidence and helps in making a good impression. Candidates were allotted Identification Numbers and these numbers were pinned on their shirts so that these numbers are easily visible to both assessors and other candidates. Candidates were then made to sit in a semi-circle. This was done so that the three assessors could have a good look and also listen to all the candidates



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comfortably. Thereafter, a detailed briefing was conducted to apprise the candidates of all dos and don'ts during the course of this GD. In particular, candidates were told that group members have the liberty to discuss the topic as they view appropriate without any kind of suggestion from the panel of assessors. Anybody can start or end the discussion but all candidates should be given opportunity to speak. They were asked to also maintain discipline which implied that they should not speak over each other. Candidates were asked to complete the GD in 25-30 minutes and in the end, any candidate could summarise the group discussion. Candidates were then given 5 minutes to think and organise their ideas about the topic and were also allowed to jot down some points on a piece of paper, if they deem fit.

Candidates were given three topics, which fell into the category of 'Topical Type Group Discussion' and were asked to select one after mutual agreement. The above topic was picked up by this group for a discussion. Subsequently, the GD proceeded in the following manner:

Candidate No. 8 : Good morning friends. Hope all of you are doing well and are keen to express your views on this current topic. Presently, India and the US enjoy close relations and share common views on a large number of

issues such as terrorism, nuclear weapon programmes, and most significantly, Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific, etc. Both countries are now cooperating in dozens of bilateral dialogues and working groups, which practically cover all aspects of human activities, from space and health to energy and high technology, etc. While a large number of Indians now stay in the US, a recent survey indicates that 77% of Americans have a favourable view of India, something which has remained consistent over the last some years. The global war on terror of America did align with India's efforts to combat its own organised terrorism threats. And this gave both nations a common cause to increase cooperation in intelligence, law enforcement and military relations. However, all this does not imply that India-US relations have always remained so cordial. There have been quite a few bad patches in this relationship as well owing to changing international and domestic situations in the past. We need to dwell upon all these aspects of India-US relationship in a detailed manner. May I now request you to express your views.

Candidate No. 3 : I feel developments in relations between India and the US date back to quite some time and we may consider discussing it into three phases. First phase: before India's freedom. Second phase: after India's independence. Third phase: after the year 2000. In my opinion, this approach will make our discussion more detailed and bring forward developments in a sequence. I hope you all agree with me?

Candidate No. 9 : Yes, it's a good suggestion. But, I feel, we need to dwell on India-US relations before the year 2000 in short and then spend more time in discussing these relations after the year 2000 to make it more current and interesting.

Candidate No. 5 : Well, historically speaking, it is believed that famous essay "Civil Disobedience" written by American poet and philosopher Henry David in 1849 did subsequently inspire Mahatma Gandhi to start freedom movement in India. And later, American Black Civil Rights leader Martin Luther King Junior was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, who used to keep Gandhiji's

picture in his office and dining room. In 1893, Swami Vivekananda addressed the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago and dazzled the audience there. Some experts also think that famous American-English poet T.S. Eliot's work had the impact of Bhagavad Gita. Later, in 1943 US President Franklin D. Roosevelt emphatically told the then British PM Winston Churchill that India should be made a Commonwealth at once and must be entitled to a modern form of government, with which Churchill, of course, never agreed. I think these many details about India-US relations for the period before 1947 should be considered adequate.

Candidate No. 2 : Yes, I agree, these many details would suffice to cover the period before 1947.

Candidate No. 1 : After independence, India and the US shared quite a few common values, like democracy, religious tolerance and liberty of expression, etc., yet it appeared, these were not adequate to make the two countries become best of friends. In this regard, India had reservations about joining military groupings, SEATO (South East Asia Treaty Organization) in the year 1954 and also CENTO (Central Treaty Organization) in the year 1955, in which Pakistan was also made a member. At that time, these groupings were created primarily to check spread of Communism and America then considered India to be friendly with Russia. This happened despite the fact that India followed a non-alignment policy. Also, the US, UK and France did not agree with India to declare Pakistan as an aggressor when India brought the issue of Jammu and Kashmir to the UN. However, later the US did supply some defence equipment to India when China attacked it in 1962.

Candidate No. 9 : I would like to add that when India was facing shortage of food, the US helped India by sending wheat under PL-480 Scheme. Even though these supplies were interrupted as India differed with the US on the issue of Vietnam. Later, the US agriculture scientists assisted India in ushering the Green Revolution. America also helped India in establishing the IIT Kanpur.

Candidate No. 6 : So, all this shows that India-US relations were quite cordial during this period. Am I right?

Candidate No. 8 : No, India-US relations really witnessed a very bad period in 1971, when the US decided to support Pakistan, when military dictator Yahya Khan's army committed atrocities in East Pakistan. Rather than helping a democratic India, US attempted to scare India by dispatching 7th Fleet to Bay of

Bengal. Subsequently, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and economic liberalisation in India in 1991-92, India and the US tried to cooperate and work in mutually beneficial areas. But, once again, in May 1998 India-US relations were adversely impacted when the US imposed severe sanctions on India after the latter conducted the nuclear tests. Later, after several rounds of talks between the two countries, it took some time before these sanctions were finally withdrawn.

Candidate No. 7 : I think we have covered India-US relations before the year 2000 fairly adequately.

Candidate No. 4 : Yes, I quite agree.

Candidate No. 10 : Let us discuss India-US relations in the year 2000 and beyond, which I think will be much more interesting and bring out contemporary developments as well.

Candidate No. 5 : Yes, India-US relations took a positive turn in the year 2000, when the then US President Mr. Bill Clinton visited India. In 2001, both the then US President Mr. George W. Bush and Indian PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee expressed a strong interest in transforming the US-India bilateral relationship, and thereafter significant steps were taken in this direction. Subsequently, in 2006, Civil Nuclear Agreement under President George Bush and Indian PM Dr. Manmohan Singh was signed. It needs to be noted that the US agreed to make India a nuclear nation despite the fact that India had not signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Later, during the Presidency of Mr. Barack Obama and Mr. Donald Trump, India-US relations continued to improve and US did recognise India's strategic importance in the Indo-Pacific. Both US and India opted to improve trade and commerce and also advocated peaceful resolution of all disputes under international laws, including UNCLOS (United Nations Convention On the Law of the Sea).

Candidate No. 2 : I feel No. 5 has covered this period of India-US relations quite well.

Candidate No. 1 : Yes, I think this phase could be described as the best, which also led to India becoming America's strategic partner and a major defence partner. America accorded the Strategic Trade Authorization (STA-1) status to India, which placed India at par with America's NATO allies for transfer of sensitive technologies. India also signed a number of fundamental communication agreements to enhance communication and intelligence sharing. In the subsequent years, India's defence and security cooperation with the US

improved significantly. And India's imports of gas and oil from the US also witnessed much increase.

Candidate No. 3 : I think India's military relations with America need special attention here.

Candidate No. 6 : Yes, quite right. India's military relations with the US have acquired much importance in recent times.

Candidate No. 8 : The fact remains that presently in view of current international geo-political situation, India is considered a strategically significant partner by the US. India is needed to create a stable balance of power in the larger Indo-Pacific and also improve America's declining credibility in the region, particularly in view of dominating posture adopted by China. In fact, India's military relations with the US have been improving for quite some time now. In 2002, the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) was signed to share military intelligence between the two nations. This was followed by Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in 2016, which permits the military of either country to use others' bases for re-supplying or carrying out repairs. Later, two more agreements were signed in 2018 and 2020 to share information and exchange unclassified products and services.

Candidate No. 3 : So, we can see India's military relations with America have been improving for some time now. However, I understand, from the past few years, American supply of military equipment to India has increased substantially.

Candidate No. 5 : Yes, presently the US is one of the top suppliers of military equipment to India, along with Russia, Israel, France and UK. In the recent past, AH-64 Apache, CH-47 Chinook and SH-60 Seahawk helicopters, transport aircraft Boeing C-17 and C-130 J Super Hercules, Maritime patrol aircraft Boeing P-8 and other military equipment have been supplied by the US to India. India has been conducting joint military exercises including Malabar exercises with the US for quite some time now. Therefore, US defence and security cooperation has increased remarkably during the past few years.

Candidate No. 4 : I think we have covered military relations between the two nations fairly adequately.

Candidate No. 1 : I think India's trade relations with America also need to be emphasised. During the year 2021-22, the US has replaced China as India's largest trading partner and bilateral trade has also touched about \$119 billion

mark. Indian companies are also coming forward to invest in American states. Finally, America continues to remain the largest source of cutting-edge technologies for India in a number of fields.

Candidate No. 8 : I would like to briefly mention about nuclear cooperation between India and America. You would recall that when India tested nuclear weapons in 1998, US, Japan and several European nations imposed a number of sanctions on India, but India asserted that its nuclear programme was needed to provide a deterrence to potential nuclear threats. India emphasised that it will never use nuclear weapons first, but it will retaliate if attacked with nuclear weapons.

Candidate No. 5 : I think these sanctions were lifted in 2001 and subsequently in 2006, the US Congress passed the historic India-US Civil Nuclear Agreement which cleared civilian nuclear commerce with India for the first time in 30 years. It allowed India to buy US nuclear reactors and fuel for civilian use. Later, in 2006 India-US Civil Nuclear Agreement was also signed which permits peaceful nuclear cooperation and governs nuclear trade between Indian and American firms.

Candidate No. 10 : I think Nos. 8 and 5 have covered this aspect quite well.

Candidate No. 9 : I think another positive aspect of India-US relations is that US has backed India's candidature for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council also.

Candidate No. 7 : Yes, quite right. I agree.

Candidate No. 1 : Friends, in recent years, while India is facing a dominating China on its borders, its cooperation with US has gone to another level. While India has joined QUAD with the US, Japan and Australia to counter Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific, it has joined US in tackling several global issues also. These include supply of Covid-19 vaccines, climate change and Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. India has also joined I2U2, which is a group of India, Israel, the UAE and the US and aims to cooperate on joint investment and new initiatives in water, energy, transportation, space, health and food security.

Candidate No. 8 : During the past few years, India's relations with the US have become even closer due to several international developments. These include America's strategic need to face a rapidly growing and dominating China and counter Russia. Secondly, after withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan, America wants to establish its supremacy.

To meet this dual challenge, US needs India's support to maintain a power balance in Asia. Towards this aim, the US has taken several steps to encourage India to come out of Russian influence to procure military equipment. To boost India's firepower against China, America has offered India fifth-generation advanced stealth fighter, the F-35 and also F-21, as well as other aircraft and nuclear-powered submarines, etc. Consequently, America has now become India's major supplier of defence equipment.

Candidate No. 5 : Friends, we all know that India's good relations with Russia are a setback to India-US relations. America had vehemently objected to India buying Russian S-400 missile systems. However, to strengthen India-US relations, very recently, US Congress passed an India-specific waiver to CAATSA (Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act) sanctions to enable India purchase Russian S-400 missile system. This was primarily done to help India secure its borders against China and Pakistan, though America did not waive similar sanctions imposed against China and Turkey.

Candidate No. 3 : It now appears that America now treats India as one of her strategic partners.

Candidate No. 1 : Yes, I would like to remind you that recently when Russia invaded Ukraine, India declined to take a firm stand against Russia, even though America and other Western nations pressurised it to do so. Subsequently, America did show understanding and appreciated India's strategic need to maintain good relations with Russia. As a result, due to this development, India-US relations were not adversely impacted. In recent times, the US has taken several steps to increase trade deals for a prospering and close economic and strategic relationship with India. Presently, over 30 missions between Indian and American governments are working to increase cooperation between the two countries in various spheres.

Candidate No. 9 : Friends, I think the time allotted to us for this group discussion is getting over and we should conclude it. Can somebody come forward to summarise this GD now?

Candidate No. 8 : Well friends, I think we had a very informative and fruitful discussion on this topic. We have discussed in details various developments pertaining to India-US relations. In recent years, the US has realised that enhanced cooperation with India is needed to counter a rising and dominating China. At the same time, India also appreciates

the regional and global position of the US as crucial to curbing China's increasing strategic ambitions. While India and US are world's largest and oldest democracies, presently more than 4 million Indians stay in America and India has huge gas and oil imports from the US, which are valued at about \$14 billion. Bilateral trade in goods between the two countries has now crossed \$119 billion. In recent years, cybersecurity cooperation between the two countries has also increased manifold. Finally, I will conclude by saying India-US relationship in the 21st century should continue to grow despite many challenges and points of divergence.

Thank you friends and you all have a good day.

Critical Assessment of Candidates' Performance:

Good : 1, 5 and 8

These three candidates remained the main speakers throughout this group discussion. Candidate No. 8 took the initiative to start as well as summarise this GD. They spoke with good self-confidence and facts and data quoted by them were not contradicted by other candidates. Their conduct made it abundantly clear that they had come with sufficient preparation, which is certainly needed to effectively participate in a competitive group discussion. They displayed good knowledge of this topic, which may not be so easy to acquire. They also behaved in a courteous manner with other candidates and other candidates did accept their leadership qualities. Owing to all these reasons, their performance has been assessed as 'Good'.

Average : 3 and 9

These candidates had some knowledge of this topic, but apparently due to lack of adequate preparation, could not contribute much. Due to the same reason, they lacked essentially required self-confidence to speak. On more than one occasion, these candidates did help the group discussion to proceed further. However, in the overall judgement, their contribution to this group discussion remained limited only. Due to these reasons, their performance has been assessed as 'Average'.

Below Average : 2, 4, 6, 7 and 10

These candidates barely made any contribution to this group discussion and merely watched other candidates speak. To make their presence felt, they either appreciated candidates who were speaking, or asked other candidates to speak. By observing their performance, it became clear that they had not done any preparation to take part in this group discussion. They should have realised that it is not at all desirable to take part in a competitive GD without sufficient preparation. Owing to all these reasons, their performance has been assessed as 'Below Average'.

CSR